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LETTER DATED 27 JANUARY 1998 FROM THE PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF ISRAEL TO THE UNITED NATIONS ADDRESSED TO THE SECRETARY-GENERAL

I wish to refer to the letter dated 6 January 1998 from the Permanent Representative of Lebanon to the Secretary-General (S/1998/7), requesting the extension of the mandate of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) for a further period of six months.

As on previous occasions, most recently in our letter to you dated 30 July 1997 (S/1997/603), I am obliged to respond to a number of incorrect or misleading points made in the Lebanese letter.

These misconceptions arise from the failure to recognize the simple fact that the fundamental cause of the volatile situation in South Lebanon is the heinous terrorist activity carried out by Hizbollah and other terrorist organizations, both Lebanese and Palestinian, acting under its umbrella. Not only is the Government of Lebanon unable or unwilling to prevent the use of Lebanese territory as a base for aggression against Israel, but, in clear violation of international law and the Charter of the United Nations, it supports and encourages such activity, together with other States well known for their support of international terrorism.

In these circumstances, Israel has no choice whatsoever but to exercise its right of self-defence in order to protect the lives of the civilian population in its northern towns and villages. Israel has repeatedly explained that it has no territorial claims or ambitions in South Lebanon and that, were the Government of Lebanon to comply with its obligation to dismantle terrorist infrastructure and to prevent attacks on Israel, there would be no reason for an Israeli presence in this area.

In this context, I would like to clarify Israel's position with regard to Security Council resolution 425 (1978). As clearly stated by Israel's Minister of Defence in a recent interview for the magazine Al-Watan Al-Arabi, Israel is ready to implement the provisions of the resolution. However, resolution 425 (1978) does not call for an unconditional withdrawal; Israel is prepared to implement the withdrawal envisaged in the resolution, but only within a

framework that will ensure the implementation of all elements of the resolution, including implementation of UNIFIL's expressly stated goals of the "restoring of international peace and security" and "assisting the Government of Lebanon in ensuring the return of its effective authority in the area". Such effective authority would obviously have to include, inter alia, arrangements for the protection of all residents of the area.

Once again I avail myself of this opportunity to call upon the Government of Lebanon to return to the negotiating table and engage in dialogue to achieve a treaty of peace within the framework of the Middle East peace process, which would ensure peace and security for both sides. Were the Government of Lebanon to expend the energy that it currently devotes to distributing misinformation, instead of to combating the terrorist activities within its territory and engaging in face-to-face negotiations, the prospects for peace along our border would be greatly increased.

I should be grateful if you would have the present letter circulated as a document of the Security Council.

(Signed) Ambassador Dore GOLD
Permanent Representative